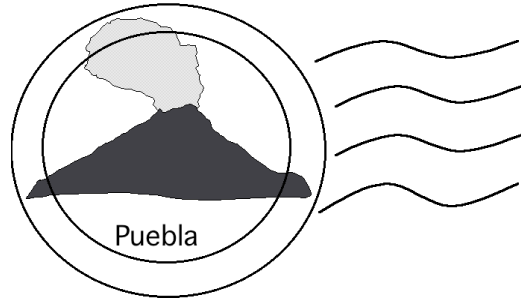


HOLA AMIGOS!

On behalf of my family, I'd like to welcome you to Mexico. My name is Consuela, and I am writing to tell you all about the area of Mexico that I live in. It's a shame that you are not coming to visit for real



Mount Popocatepetl is located in central Mexico between Mexico City and Puebla.

because you could stay with me! My mother is a very good cook and would prepare a grand Mexican feast if you came!

We have an active volcano, formally called Mount Popocatepetl, and it is the main attraction for geologists and volcanologists traveling to southern Mexico. I recently began conducting research on this mountain for my school. If you're wondering about the long and difficult name, Mount Popocatepetl was named by the ancient Aztecs. Translated literally, it means "Smoking Mountain." They called it this because steam and volcanic gasses were

constantly pouring out of its large crater. In fact, small columns of steam have been observed coming out of the crater even in recent years.

My family lives in the city of Puebla. We're only about 16 km southeast of Mexico City, which is the second biggest metropolitan area in the world. Over 20 million people live there! Our city of Puebla is also pretty large, with over 1.2 million people. "Mount Popo," as it is commonly referred to, is only 40 km to the southeast of our town. The volcano is part of a range of volcanoes in Southern Mexico that line up from east to west. You can see Mt. Popo from afar because it is snow-capped and its peak is 5,000 meters (16,400 ft) above sea level!

When I began research on Mount Popo last month, it was my first time there! A geology professor at the local university accompanied me on my trip up the mountain, so I saw firsthand the gigantic crater, which is 612 meters across – that's almost 7 entire football



Popocatepetl most recent activity was from 1995 to 1997.

http://volcano.und.nodak.edu/vwdocs/volc_images/north_america/mexico/popocatepetl.html

fields! In the coming months when I return, we'll be studying the composition of the minerals that have been deposited around the volcano to find out how often the volcano erupts.

For me, the threat of an eruption is always in the back of my mind, especially since so many of us live pretty close to it. I know it is 40 km away from our home, but when a volcano of this size has a huge eruption, 40 km doesn't mean much! In fact, I remember a huge scare we had when I was in elementary school. It was December 21, 1994, and I was about to walk to school when it started raining. But this wasn't the kind of rainwater we usually get – it was raining ashes! I also remember there were a series of earthquakes, and everyone thought that the ash clouds and earthquakes meant that Mount Popo was going to have a gigantic eruption. The volcano kept having very minor eruptions that were scaring the townspeople, so the government moved everyone in the town to a safer area away from the volcano. Geologists from around the world got together to predict what the mountain was going to do. Luckily, there was no gigantic explosion...whew!

I still remember that winter, and my parents are always saying that we should move away from the volcano. Scientists say that a huge eruption could have an impact on up to 30 million people, affecting Mexico City and its surrounding areas. The volcano hasn't acted up too much in recent years, and the major eruptions took place more than 10,000 years ago. The last serious eruption occurred around the 9th century, and about 20 minor eruptions have been recorded ever since then. My professor is on a team of scientists that is constantly trying to predict what the volcano will do in the future. My parents might worry. In fact, I'm surprised they let me do research on the mountain! But I don't think there's anything to worry about.

Well, I must be off now to soccer practice. Do you play? If so, we should play if you ever come visit! Until then, take care, and learn a lot about Mount Popo. Adios!

Your buddy,
Consuela Sanchez
19°N 98°W